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## NEWS FROM THE GETTY

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Figure making sound, Mikhail Larionov, Velimir Khlebnikov and Alexei Kruchenykh, *Mirskontsa* (Worldbackwards), Moscow, 1912

### GETTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE PRESENTS "EXPLODITY: AN EVENING OF TRANSRATIONAL SOUND POETRY"

At the Getty Center  
Wednesday, February 4, 2009, 7-8:45 p.m.

*"I saw language come alive with my very own eyes. The breath of the primordial word wafted into my face. And I realized that I had been born dumb."*

-- *Benedikt Livshits, The One and a Half-Eyed Archer.*

LOS ANGELES—Enjoy a rare evening of literary performance as the Getty Research Institute (GRI) presents *"Exploidity: An Evening of Transrational Sound Poetry,"* featuring scholar Oleg Minin's dramatic readings of the revolutionary *zaum'* ("transrational") poetry of the Russian avant-garde, along with contemporary sound poets Christian Bök and Steve McCaffery performing their own work.

Inspired by the GRI's *Tango with Cows: Book Art of the Russian Avant-Garde, 1910 – 1917*, on view at the Getty Center through April 19, 2009, "Exploidity" traces the singular influence of poets Velimir Khlebnikov and Alexei Kruchenykh on twentieth-century sound poetry, including the use of invented words, the combination of the sensical and the nonsensical, and the creation of "meaning" through sound. By invoking *zaum'*, the evening's performance explores the link between early sound experiments and what came to be known, in the post-World War II era, as sound poetry – a movement very much alive today.

Drawing from the GRI's superb collection of Russian modernist books, *Tango with Cows* chronicles a small community of Russian poets and visual artists between the revolutions of 1905 and 1917 who invented a new relationship between word, image, and sound to express their ambivalence about the rapid influx of modern technologies and the growth of cities in a

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predominantly rural Russia, and to reflect their central preoccupations with primitivism, Russian Orthodoxy, urban apocalypse, and verbal explosion.

*Tango with Cows* takes its title from a book and poem by Vasily Kamensky. The absurd and incongruous image of farm animals dancing the tango mirrors the nonsensical word combinations that Russian poets explored in their newly created sonic language called *zaum'*—an invented term meaning transrational or "beyond sense." *Zaum'* was inspired by an eclectic range of sources, including the incantations of Russian Orthodox priests and village shamans, the nonsense syllables of nursery rhymes, and the cacophony of the modern city. The Russian avant-garde utilized the verbal and visual disruptions of *zaum'* to convey humor, parody, and unease about Russia's past, present, and future.

"In their *zaum'*, Russian avant garde poets used aggressive sounds and varying arrangements of words on the page to jolt the reader's attention away from the meaning of the words to the sonic and visual qualities of language itself," says Nancy Perloff, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Collections at the GRI and curator of *Tango with Cows*. "'Explodity' explores the link between those early sound experiments and the sound poetry of today."

Born and raised in Russia, **Oleg Minin** received his PhD from the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Southern California. Minin's research and interests include turn-of-the-century Russian literary and visual modernism, art and literature of the early Russian avant-garde, and political satire of the first Russian Revolution. Canadian poet **Christian Bök** is perhaps best-known for *Eunoia*, a best-selling work of experimental literature that uses only one vowel in each of its five chapters, resulting in sentences like "Enfettered, these sentences repress free speech." Bök has created artificial languages for two television shows: Gene Roddenberry's *Earth: Final Conflict* and Peter Benchley's *Amazon*. Bök has also earned many accolades for his virtuoso performances of sound poetry. **Steve McCaffery**, also Canadian, was a founding member in 1970 of the internationally renowned sound poetry ensemble The Four Horsemen, as well as a founding member of the Toronto Research Group, the Canadian College of Pataphysics, and (with Fluxus artist Dick Higgins) The Institute for Creative Misunderstanding. His poetry seeks to free language from syntax and structure to evoke a purely emotional response.

*Tango with Cows* was curated by Nancy Perloff, with Allison Pultz, who serves as research assistant in Collection Development at the GRI.

*Explodity: An Evening of Transrational Sound Poetry* is presented 7-8:45 p.m., Wednesday, Feb. 4, 2009 at the Museum Lecture Hall at the Getty Center. A reception and viewing of *Tango with Cows: Book Art of the Russian Avant-Garde, 1910-1917*, precedes the performance, from 5-6:45 p.m. Admission is free, but reservations are required. For reservations, call (310) 440-7300 or visit [www.getty.edu/research](http://www.getty.edu/research).

### **RELATED SYMPOSIUM**

#### ***The Book as Such in the Russian Avant-Garde***

Thursday February 5, 2009, 9 a.m.

Museum Lecture Hall, Getty Center

Presented in conjunction with the exhibition *Tango with Cows: Book Art of the Russian Avant-Garde, 1910–1917*, this one-day symposium brings together scholars and artists in fields from art history to literature to explore the Russian avant-garde's revolution of the book. Talks and a roundtable discussion will address the graphic techniques, the newly invented poetic language called *zaum'* ("beyondsense"), and the visual and literary tensions between parodic humor and apocalypse, the primitive and the urban, the sacred and the profane. Speakers will also consider the early reception and the influence of the Russian avant-garde book on visual poetry and the aesthetics of book production in the later decades of the twentieth century.

Speakers include **Nina Gurianova**, Northwestern University; **Johanna Drucker**, University of Virginia; **Brian Reed**, University of Washington; **Mark D. Steinberg**, University of Illinois; **Edward Kasinec**, The New York Public Library; **Jane Sharp**, Rutgers University. Moderator: **Nancy Perloff**, Getty Research Institute

Participants in the roundtable discussion include **Craig Dworkin**, University of Utah; **Timothy Benson**, Los Angeles County Museum of Art; **Liz Kotz**, UC Riverside; and **Éva Forgács**, Art Center College of Design, Pasadena.

Admission to this symposium is free. For reservations, call (310) 440-7300 or visit [www.getty.edu/research](http://www.getty.edu/research).

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**The J. Paul Getty Trust** is an international cultural and philanthropic institution devoted to the visual arts that features the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Research Institute, the Getty Conservation Institute, and the Getty Foundation. The J. Paul Getty Trust and Getty programs serve a varied audience from two locations: the Getty Center in Los Angeles and the Getty Villa in Malibu

**The Getty Research Institute** is an operating program of the J. Paul Getty Trust. It serves education in the broadest sense by increasing knowledge and understanding about art and its history through advanced research. The Research Institute provides intellectual leadership through its research, exhibition, and publication programs and provides service to a wide range of scholars worldwide through residencies, fellowships, online resources, and a Research Library. The Research Library - housed in the 201,000-square-foot Research Institute building designed by Richard Meier - is one of the largest art and architecture libraries in the world. The general library collections (secondary sources) include almost 900,000 volumes of books, periodicals, and auction catalogues encompassing the history of Western art and related fields in the humanities. The Research Library's special collections include rare books, artists' journals, sketchbooks, architectural drawings and models, photographs, and archival materials.

**Visiting the Getty Center:**

The Getty Center is open Tuesday through Friday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. It is closed Monday and major holidays. Admission to the Getty Center is always free. Parking is \$10. No reservation is required for parking or general admission. Reservations are required for event seating and groups of 15 or more. Please call 310-440-7300 (English or Spanish) for reservations and information. The TTY line for callers who are deaf or hearing impaired is 310-440-7305.

**Additional information is available at *www.getty.edu*.**

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